

Jars of Clay Lead Singer Petitions Congress for One of the Most Devastating Issues Facing Our Generation

Nearly 40 individuals from a variety of Christian faiths and walks of life converged on Washington, D.C., on Wednesday, Oct. 4, to meet with members of Congress and encourage them not to forget the “least of these” when budget planning. These faith leaders represented a broad coalition of organizations advocating around nutrition issues in the developing world, where nearly 8,000 children are still starving to death every day, and millions more suffer from stunting and wasting diseases brought on by food scarcity.

Among those of note are Dan Haseltine, founder of Blood: Water Mission and lead singer of the contemporary Christian band Jars of Clay. He was joined by popular speaker and author Lisa Harper and her daughter Missy, whom she adopted from Haiti, one of the most food-poor nations in the world. Catholic priests, Protestant pastors, university professors, doctors and non-profit ministry leaders and volunteers rounded out the group being coordinated by Hope Through Healing Hands, Bread for the World, Christian Connections for International Health, Catholic Relief Services and Food for the Hungry, all brought together by the Eleanor Crook Foundation to tackle global nutrition.

“I am excited about this opportunity to speak personally with our representatives, to let them hear from us how much we and others care about feeding the hungry around the world,” Haseltine said. “Growing up, I never thought that I as an individual could make much of a difference in the world, but I have seen that when we do speak up, we can inspire change, and

we are grateful for the chance to do so around the specific issue of global nutrition.”

Harper brought her daughter along to teach her that she, too, can have influence, by sharing her story. “I can’t imagine my life without Missy, and it grieves me to think that there are so many more children like her around the world who suffer daily from hunger and the effects of malnutrition. How can we not speak out on their behalf and still call ourselves Christians?”

The participants came from all over the country, Los Angeles to Washington and Florida to New Jersey, representing a broad swath of faith perspectives and political persuasions, but all united around the common goal of seeing hungry children fed. They all believe passionately in the admonishment from Scripture to feed the poor and care for the widow and orphan, and hope to mobilize even greater numbers around this shared mission.

Some of the pastors included Dr. Tre Capers from Zion Benevolent Church in Hopkins, South Carolina; Rev. Kalaba Chali of the United Methodist Church Conference in Wichita, Kansas; Pastor Jonathan Nelms of Covenant Church in Cookeville, Tenn.; Father Timothy Graff from the Archdiocese of Newark, N.J.; Sister Diane Koorie of the Sisters of Mercy in Oklahoma; Derek Quan from the Greater Phoenix Chinese Church in Arizona; and Dr. Gary Furr, Pastor of Vestavia Hills Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. Some of the organizations and colleges represented are Compassion International, Accord/Lifeline Christian Mission, MedSend, Union College, Fisk University and Liberty University.

“We have gathered an amazingly diverse group for this trip to Washington because of the common concern for those who are starving and malnourished around the world,” said Jenny Dyer, Ph.D., Executive Director of HTHH. “If we reach as wide an array of congressional leaders as we are bringing faith-

leaders, we know it will have an impact when it comes to earmarking global assistance funding for the areas of direst need.”

The group plans to share facts such as these about the fight to end global hunger:

- 1) Nearly 1 in 3 people worldwide is affected by malnutrition.
- 2) More than 795 million suffer from hunger.
- 3) Less than 1 percent of foreign assistance goes to nutrition, and foreign assistance is less than 1 percent of the entire U.S. budget.
- 4) 5.9 million children die every year from preventable, treatable causes, and nearly half of those children die from undernutrition.
- 5) The 1,000 days of pregnancy until a child’s second birthday is the most critical time period for life-changing impact on a child’s future.

In addition to seeing the hungry fed, the group realizes there are added benefits to the U.S. providing nutrition aid in the developing world. Foreign assistance is a powerful “third leg of the stool” alongside diplomacy and defense when it comes to preserving U.S. self-interests. American generosity gives our nation a positive image overseas and when our benevolence extends to meeting the felt needs of desperate people groups, they are less likely to respond in violence.